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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 1 July 1992 at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MROZIEWICZ (Poland)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

(a) Special programmes of economic assistance

(b) Humanitarian assistance

(c) Disaster relief coordination

Mr. ELIASSON (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs) said that the previous year a pioneering debate had been held in the Economic and Social Council in Geneva on the capacity of the United Nations to coordinate humanitarian assistance, which had led to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182 in December 1991 and to the establishment of a new Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Significant steps had been undertaken to revitalize the Economic and Social Council, which was playing a crucial role in shaping the policy of the United Nations in that important area.

The world of the 1990s was a world of turbulent change. At the cold war's conclusion, there was an explosion of ethnic and civil conflicts. Many societies were torn between demands for autonomy or self-determination and the dangers of fragmentation, or what the Secretary-General had termed micronationalism. The upheavals were taking a tragic toll of human lives and the international community must provide humanitarian support, above all by bringing relief to vulnerable groups like women and children, often the first and the worst affected in such conflicts.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had recently warned that poverty was accelerating environmental degradation to such an extent that the world's resources might not be sufficient to provide the food required for its population. Five hundred million people, or roughly 10 per cent of the world's population, were undernourished, and some 50 million faced famine. The natural increase of 97 million people per year during the 1990s would cause more displacement and refugee flows in the years to come.

(Mr. Eliasson)

In Africa, for instance, drought, environmental degradation, civil conflict and underdevelopment had combined to wreak havoc: millions of men, women and children were threatened by disease and by lack of food and water, especially in the Horn of Africa. In Somalia, countless lives had been lost through starvation and senseless slaughter; the conflict had prevented relief efforts from reaching people in desperate need. The situation in the Horn of Africa must be at the centre of United Nations attention.

The drought currently ravaging southern Africa, which had no parallel in living memory, threatened the social fabric and economic structures of several States. Eighteen million people in southern Africa faced starvation. In Mozambique and Angola, where civil strife had also taken its toll, the drought had added another dimension to already severe problems.

A joint pledging conference of the United Nations and the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference on the drought had been convened on 1 June in Geneva under the chairmanship of President Masire of Botswana. The response to that initiative had been very positive. Pledges in an amount of $578 million had been received against $856 million suggested in the consolidated appeal. Drawing on that encouraging result, the two organizations would continue to mobilize the resources required to meet fully the urgent needs of the region.

The primary objective of humanitarian assistance was to alleviate human suffering resulting either from natural hazards or from man-made emergencies; in some cases, as in the Horn of Africa, the two were combined. It was evident that the United Nations had a crucial and growing role in the area of humanitarian assistance and emergency relief. United Nations humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. The sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States would be fully respected and assistance would be provided with the consent of the affected country and, in principle, on the basis of an appeal by that country.

Resolution 46/182 provided the United Nations with four tools for coordination: the new emergency office, the Central Emergency Revolving Fund,

(Mr. Eliasson)

the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the consolidated appeals; innovative and invaluable instruments.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator worked through the new Department of Humanitarian Affairs, with a New York office and a Geneva office, the first focusing on policy planning and the policy and diplomatic dimensions of emergencies, and the latter acting as the focal point for emergency operational support. The New York office would address complex emergencies, working closely with the political and economic departments concerned to ensure humanitarian access and to facilitate a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development. Once relief operations were in place, the Geneva office would monitor follow-up, identify unmet needs and prepare situation reports in cooperation with the resident coordinators of the countries concerned.

The new Central Emergency Revolving Fund was designed to ensure that resources were available to operational organizations for prompt response to emergencies. The target of $50 million financing for the Fund had been reached after two donors' meetings. The first disbursement of $2 million had been made to assist vulnerable groups in Kenya, and a request from UNICEF for $5 million for Somalia was being processed.

The third tool for coordination was the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which was to meet a few times each year to address policy issues concerning United Nations response to emergencies. The International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Organization for Migration would participate fully in the work of the Committee and representatives of non-governmental organizations would be invited on an ad hoc basis. In addition, an inter-agency working group was being established for regular consultations at the middle management level.

A number of meetings had been held on humanitarian needs in the former Yugoslavia, although logistical coordination remained with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva, as well as on Somalia and the Iraq situation. At the country level, the resident

(Mr. Eliasson)

coordinator was the main channel for coordination and would head the disaster management team in each affected country.

The fourth instrument for coordination was the consolidated appeal, which had already been used to address emergencies requiring collective action. As already mentioned, a successful consolidated appeal had been made for the drought in southern Africa and new appeals had been made for Afghanistan, Yugoslavia and Kenya. An updated consolidated appeal for the Horn of Africa would be launched in mid-July 1992.

General Assembly resolution 46/182 had rightly emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes of disasters as well as ensuring a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development. The United Nations played a cardinal role in mobilizing the necessary international support to address the root causes of crises and to smooth the transition to reconstruction and development.

Humanitarian assistance must be provided regardless of whether there was an immediate solution at hand, but the United Nations had been increasingly called upon to address simultaneously both the humanitarian and the political dimensions of conflicts. Impartial humanitarian assistance could have a positive effect on peacemaking efforts, as could corridors of peace and zones of tranquillity.

The United Nations was often asked as well to negotiate arrangements to ensure the safety of personnel and relief supplies. The presence of a United Nations operation had not always been sufficient to deter hostile action. Attacks on United Nations personnel and aid workers were cowardly and self-defeating and constituted serious violations of international and humanitarian law.

The problem of land-mines must be urgently addressed. The indiscriminate maiming of innocent people by mines was an affront to the international conscience; de-mining was crucially important to peace-building.

The United Nations system had in recent years been developing systems to give early warning of, among other things, natural disasters, famine and disease. That capacity for preventive action must be systematically mobilized.

(Mr. Eliasson)

All operational organizations must cooperate if an effective United Nations response to disasters and emergencies was to be mounted; if they did not, the biggest losers of all were the victims who should receive assistance.

The United Nations stood ready to meet emergencies of increasing number and complexity, but it must be provided with the necessary resources. The Secretary-General had emphasized in his recent report to the Security Council on preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping (A/47/277-S/24111, para. 83) that trust required a sense of confidence that the world Organization would react swiftly, surely and impartially and that it would not be debilitated by political opportunism or by administrative or financial inadequacy. That, the Secretary-General went on to indicate, presupposed a strong, efficient and independent international civil service whose integrity was beyond question and an assured financial basis that lifted the Organization, once and for all, out of its present mendicancy.

Mr. GOMEZ (Associate Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said that the whole philosophy of General Assembly resolution 46/182 rested on the key notion of the continuum from relief to recovery and development. Over the past year, the secretariat and the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had devoted much time to examining wherein lay its comparative advantage in implementing the concepts in resolution 46/182 and how it could help to bridge the chasm that had long divided relief practitioners from development practitioners. The results of those reflections followed.

Disasters occurred when hazards interacted with vulnerable populations; vulnerability arose from poverty and would be reduced through economic and social development. Also, there was no such thing as a monosectoral disaster: measures to deal with the immediate effects of a disaster might indeed be concentrated in one sector, but measures to deal with its secondary and indirect effects invariably spread throughout the affected country's economy.

The concept of disaster/development interlinkages was more than empty development jargon; it called for the weight of the development establishment to be brought to bear in a concerted and expeditious manner. That did not

(Mr. Gomez)

mean that UNDP should give major funding to relief operations, but it did mean that UNDP should assist in ensuring that recovery activities were instantly embarked upon as an integrated part of relief operations. Equally, reconstruction and recovery activities must not merely replicate the same vulnerability that had caused the disaster in the first place.

Resident coordinators' responsibility for the in-country coordination of the relief activities of the United Nations system needed to be emphasized. The resident coordinators who were responsible for coordinating both relief and development, were in a unique position to promote the concept of the continuum at the country level.

1992 was the third year of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. In that regard, he was pleased to report that the value of UNDP-administered humanitarian assistance projects continued to rise; of the current figure of some $120 million, 39 per cent was for prevention and preparedness, 21 per cent for relief and 40 per cent for reconstruction and rehabilitation. Many of the funds were administered on a bilateral cost-sharing basis. Other UNDP projects likewise served indirectly to reduce vulnerability to disaster.

UNDP also supported other United Nations humanitarian efforts. The first head of UNDP's Humanitarian Programme had served also as Director of the Special Emergency Programme for the Horn of Africa (SEPHA) and had made his services available to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs; his successor would continue that work. Efforts within UNDP itself included the joint UNDP/DHA Disaster Management Training Programme, which, with vital generous financial support from donors and inputs from FAO, UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization, provided training courses for the benefit of Governments, non-governmental organizations, bilateral donors and the United Nations system; special mention should be made, too, of the UNDP-administered United Nations Volunteers programme. UNDP was also developing the special emergency procedures called for in General Assembly resolution 46/182; full details would be provided at its Governing Council's 1993 session.

(Mr. Gomez)

UNDP and UNHCR were members of a working group, in which FAO, UNICEF and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs were represented on the long-term resettlement of returning refugees. UNDP's relevant experience gained from its activities connected with the International Conference on Central American Refugees and the Regional Development Programme for Central America would be applicable to resettlement efforts elsewhere, such as in Somalia.

One emergency-related issue not mentioned in Assembly resolution 46/182, but assuming alarming proportions in Eastern Europe, in some countries members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and in Africa and Asia, was that of internally displaced persons. Although resident coordinators were responsible for in-country efforts in that regard, there was no clear-cut division of labour among United Nations bodies. The work of UNHCR, splendid as it was, had been necessarily on a case-by-case basis. The "automaticity" of systems emphasized by UNDP could be achieved only with a clear-cut division of labour, a decision on which was urgently needed.

Addressing the Council the previous year, he had suggested that proposals for restructuring should be measured against two criteria: their efficiency and effectiveness for in-country emergency response; and the obtaining of political, financial and public-opinion backing. An excellent start had been made with regard to the first criteria, although much more needed to be done, and UNDP would play its part; the second criterion had to be addressed to Member States. The response to both points would largely determine how well an already overstretched United Nations system responded not only to the deteriorating situation regarding "old" emergencies throughout the world but to the depressingly long list of "new" ones.

Mr. YENEL (Turkey) expressed appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for the important work his Department carried out; the work on coordinating humanitarian assistance had been one of the Council's most significant recent achievements. The new Department could also be useful in disaster prevention, a task whose importance was appreciated by all, although most of the available funding was for the provision of immediate relief. National committees of the sort envisaged under the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction were

(Mr. Yenel, Turkey)

essential for promoting awareness. In Turkey, damage caused by natural disasters represented 0.2 per cent of GNP over the past two decades, and a further 0.8 per cent of GNP had been required for disaster management in order to maintain rehabilitation expenditure at current levels. The direct cost of earthquakes could reach 2 per cent of GNP after the year 2000, and might well attain 7-10 per cent of GNP if large earthquakes occurred in industrial areas. A national plan, aimed at limiting the cost to about 0.6 per cent of GNP, had been prepared, but to apply it during the Decade called for an average annual expenditure on research, development and implementation equivalent to 0.1 per cent of GNP.

The three basic stages in disaster relief were prevention, immediate relief and post-disaster action. The last stage, in which the welfare and rehabilitation of survivors required priority, had perhaps not received due attention. Without effective assistance, human suffering could be needlessly prolonged, but an aftermath did not attract the media attention which, to a large extent, helped to galvanize and focus international concern, and the stricken country might be left with the painful tasks of rehabilitation and reconstruction, using only its own meagre resources, with the inevitable social consequences. The world community and the countries afflicted must therefore combine efforts to provide the necessary timely assistance. His delegation was confident, however, that the new Department would develop the means to maintain assistance to stricken countries in the aftermath of disasters.

The need for complentarity of disaster relief and development programmes must also be kept in mind, especially in the case of protracted emergencies. International organizations also had the duty to act as a clearing-house and coordinate their activities in the speedy delivery of essential supplies; the new framework would help to overcome the excessive formalities that had sometimes delayed aid efforts in the past.

Mr. LEPAROVIC (Observer for Croatia) said that his delegation shared the view, voiced by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, that the primary aim of humanitarian assistance was to alleviate the suffering that arose from disasters, whether natural or man-made. Croatia, as everyone knew,

(Mr. Leparović, Observer, Croatia)

was suffering the consequences of a man-made disaster, stemming from the campaign of plunder being waged against it, and against Bosnia and Herzegovina, by the forces of Serbia and Montenegro. Thousands of lives had already been lost, and the number of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina currently registered in Croatia was 291,862; in addition, there were 260,000 displaced persons from inside Croatia and some 30,000 refugees from Serbia, mainly from Vojvodina and Kosovo. The need for emergency resources in order to deal with pressing problems relating to food and accommodation, hygiene and medical services were enormous and still growing. The international community's assistance, although welcome, had been inadequate and must be increased as a matter of vital urgency. The external funding needed for bare essentials had been estimated at $30 million per month; and the total cost of enabling refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes, including tasks such as rehousing, had been put at $6.5 billion.

The plight of children was especially alarming. The figures available showed that at least 81 had been killed, 384 wounded and some 2,000 orphaned; and over 200,000 had been forced to leave their homes. Children accounted for roughly two thirds of the refugee population. The Croatian Government called on the international community to do its utmost to provide the necessary emergency relief and to promote the speedy adoption of appropriate political solutions at the international level, which were a necessary precondition for a lasting solution.

Lastly, his delegation wished to state that, since the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia no longer existed, no component part of that former State could automatically become its only successor and inherit its membership in the United Nations and its major organs and agencies. The rights and obligations pertaining to membership applied to six constituent republics of the former entity; three of those - Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia - had met the criteria of the Charter of the United Nations and become Member States in their own right. The current Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not share the same foundations of United Nations membership with those three republics. The Government of the Republic of Croatia

(Mr. Leparović, Observer, Croatia)

therefore considered that the current Yugoslavia was still not a member of the United Nations family of organizations and of the Council in particular.

Mr. BARRETT (United Kingdom), speaking of behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 46/182, establishing the post of a high-level relief coordinator, significantly enhanced United Nations capabilities and responsibility for a rapid, well-coordinated response to major and complex disasters. The States members of the European Community congratulated the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs on the way in which he had begun to implement the resolution, and assured him of their full support. They welcomed the concentrating of policy coordination in New York and operational functions in Geneva; they hoped that he would be given all the necessary human resources for the Department's tasks, and would be interested in his comments on that point. They also welcomed the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The Geneva office would need to maintain its important existing roles of information-gathering and disaster prevention; and in cases where the new Department was not in the lead, it would be important to ensure that the lead agency cooperated closely with it.

The Department's role would not be mere coordination but would also involve longer-term efforts to tackle the underlying causes of crises. Humanitarian diplomacy could sometimes be more effective than conventional relief operations, especially when the latter were restricted or rendered impossible for political or other reasons. And emergency relief should be viewed not in isolation but as part of the task of promoting recovery and long-term development. The Department must be fully supported in its efforts to build better bridges between relief and development in the future.

The appointment of a coordinator did not absolve member States from their responsibility of ensuring that all parts of the United Nations system worked closely together. To that end, the need for proper implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/182 must be made clear to all relevant governing bodies; the UNDP Governing Council's decision in that regard was welcome.

(Mr. Barrett, United Kingdom)

The States members of the European Community, having provided a substantial proportion of the resources of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, were pleased that the Fund had come into operation, now that the target of $50 million had been reached. They hoped that those who had not yet fulfilled their pledges would do so as promptly as possible, and that others in a position to contribute would do so. The new Department had seen its resources fully stretched since its inception and had already proved its worth - for example, in the Horn of Africa - and in southern Africa, and it had enabled Governments to coordinate their relief work more effectively with the United Nations, as well as to gain a clearer picture of the financial requirements, thus facilitating fund-raising. But proper follow-up to consolidated appeals was essential, as was continuous coordination and cooperation among the agencies, on a basis of partnership. The response to the urgent humanitarian needs of Burmese refugees in Bangladesh and of the displaced and other refugees in the Sudan amply demonstrated the gap that the Under-Secretary-General had been able to fill. The regrettable difficulty of delivering emergency aid on a predictable and continuous basis to Somalia, however, illustrated the complex nature of the issues he would have to tackle. In that connection, States had a responsibility to provide access to emergency assistance.

Coordination at field level remained as important as ever. The Organization's resident coordinators were the best placed for coordinating the tasks of relief, rehabilitation, rebuilding and development, and must all be adequately trained in disaster management. In that respect, the UNDP/DHA-Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator training programme deserved continuing support. The experience of non-governmental organizations, too, must be used to the full, since they often had better access to local communities and greater flexibility, thus being able to react more quickly and cost-effectively.

The European Community and its member States also paid tribute to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. As the High Commissioner's 1992 report showed, the global refugee situation had continued to deteriorate, the refugee population having remained at the unacceptably

(Mr. Barrett, United Kingdom)

high level of some 17 million. The closest possible cooperation was urged between UNHCR and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in emergencies which involved refugee flows.

Mr. ELIASSON (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs) thanked the representative of the United Kingdom for the support expressed on behalf of the States members of the European Community, as well as for the continued attention to the question of resources. With regard to the latter, a structure had been drafted and a plan of action formulated, but he would prefer to reserve further comment until the follow-up meetings, to be held shortly.

Mr. BACKSTRAND (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that his organization was greatly concerned not only by the constantly growing number of disaster victims but also by the widening gap between needs and resources. Its annual spending on disaster response had risen from 100 million to 250 million Swiss francs in the past five years, but the proportional increase in needs had been many times that. More than ever before, humanitarian needs must be viewed as a common concern, not just as national problems; the principle of universality which Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies observed in disaster response should be extended to all, victims as well as those in a position to help.

It was not enough, however, to tackle disasters in a reactive fashion. Experience had shown that the effect of disaster was greatly reduced where communities and agencies had invested in preparedness, or where organizations had tackled the potential causes. Even in disaster relief, a long-term perspective was called for. Although agencies might be neutral, all relief work had a positive or negative effect on the future vulnerability of survivors. High-profile emergency relief, therefore, was not enough; Governments and international agencies must be willing to invest in preparedness and rehabilitation. And the investment must be within the disaster-prone community, not just among the international response agencies.

Investment would help to reduce the long-term occurrence of disasters but would not eliminate it. Relief aid coordination - a topic of particular interest to his organization - was intended to enhance the effectiveness of

(Mr. Bäckstrand)

the provision of relief by non-governmental organizations to victims. Such a service was needed because of the growth in number and diversity of international and national non-governmental organizations involved in disaster relief, which in the past had led to inefficient use of resources and personnel and to confusion.

For donor Governments trying to ensure that their aid was effectively targeted, conflicting and incomplete pictures of relief needs, and uncertainties regarding the capacities of the organizations on the ground to deliver, often led to hesitation in resource commitment and poor coordination of relief efforts, both within the community of non-governmental organizations and between those organizations and the host Government and its institutions. Coordination at an international level required a clear understanding of what was happening in the country affected. Non-governmental organizations needed to be aware of each other's capacities on the ground and the organizational framework within which they must work in order to ensure that the relief operation was carried out coherently. In that connection, the International Federation was taking the initiative of making suitably trained delegates available to its National Societies, with the aim of providing assistance in four possible ways, firstly, pre-disaster preparedness assistance, including the provision of training and communications equipment where appropriate; secondly, assistance in assessing urgent requirements and in formulating effective relief action plans; thirdly, the provision of specifically allocated and suitably equipped international personnel in the event of disaster to assist National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in gathering, analysing and sharing relevant information; and fourthly, assistance to National Societies in developing their capacities to act as intermediaries between non-governmental organizations and the host Government, if so requested.

The International Federation was not, of course, claiming a monopoly on proposals to improve relief coordination, which would in any case require close cooperation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and other coordinating bodies. In some countries it might be more appropriate for other, locally based, non-governmental organizations to take the lead, but

(Mr. Bäckstrand)

where a National Society was asked to assist, the International Federation was now committed to supporting that assistance with human and financial resources.

It must be stressed that disasters were not natural events or acts of God, but rather complex occurrences in which the forces of nature, economics, environmental stress and politics interacted to destructive effect. There was now a greater need than ever to reaffirm the principle that the provision of assistance was neither partisan nor political. Accordingly, all the agencies involved in disaster response must strive to open up the channels between the disaster victim and relief aid, while ensuring that those channels were not misused for narrow political gain. It must be recognized that non-governmental or international agencies could not act alone, and that in every country they needed the help of the authorities in order to guarantee the delivery of assistance. At the very least, they needed to be confident that the flow of legitimate aid to disaster victims would not be deliberately impeded.

Mr. DZOKIC (Yugoslavia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, in his statement, the representative of Croatia had made certain allegations against the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in respect of violations of human rights. His delegation wished to point out, however, that, in particular, the claim that the Federal Republic was acting as an aggressor was completely unfounded, and it was a well-known fact that no members of the Army of the Federal Republic were involved in the hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the Army was closely cooperating with the United Nations Protection Force in implementing the Secretary-General's peace plan. He reserved the right to further comment on the allegations at a later stage.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The PRESIDENT drew the Council's attention to the forthcoming high-level segment of the Council's session. It would take place over a three-day period, from 6 to 8 July, and heads of delegations would be requested to make no more than three statements of no longer than 5 minutes each.

Mr. MARTIN (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that, since the high-level segment was

(Mr. Martin, United Kingdom)

an essential feature of the revitalized Council, the opportunity it afforded for genuine dialogue should not be lost. There was a danger that the formal statements by heads of delegations would effectively usurp the time available for debate. The delegations of the States members of the European Community were apprehensive that, should that occur, it would be difficult to persuade ministers and other senior representatives of Governments to enter the high-level segment at future sessions.

Mr. MARKER (Pakistan), Mr. MOORE (United States of America) and Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that they agreed with the comments made by the representative of the United Kingdom.

The PRESIDENT said that he shared the concern expressed by the previous speakers, and that the Bureau would meet to discuss the issue in the light of the priorities they had raised. He assured delegations that the intention was to allow as much time for dialogue as possible, provided that all delegations wishing to speak had the opportunity to do so.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.